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UNCLAS SANTO DOMINGO 000355

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ELECTIONS # 15 - PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS AS  
DOMINICAN CONGRESS POSTPONES DISCUSSION ON "SLOGAN LAW"

REF: A. SANTO DOMINGO 00233

[1](#)B. SANTO DOMINGO 00147

[1](#)1. Following is no. 15 in our series on the Dominican elections.

CONGRESS POSTPONES DISCUSSION ON "SLOGAN LAW"

Dominican President of the Chamber of Deputies Alfredo Pacheco, postponed the January 15 congressional committee session when a block of Social Christian Reform Party (PRSC) congressional representatives walked out. Since PLD congress reps were deliberately absent already, as previously threatened, this left the chamber without a quorum. The first point on today's agenda was to have been a discussion on the revised version of the controversial "slogan law" (reftels A and B). Pacheco announced that the bill would be placed on the agenda for debate next week.

PRSC spokesperson Luis Reyes Ozuna said that the representatives had abandoned their posts at the direction of party leaders. Reyes Ozuna took a swipe at the rival PLD, saying that PRSC members felt oppressed by them. "With the PLD buses bringing people here, this is no way to legislate."

The planned demonstrations against the "slogan law" were probably supported in part by the PLD, as the party that has the least to gain from the law. However, most prominent among the peaceful crowd of several hundred were civil society groups Participacion Ciudadana (PC) and Fundacion Institucionalidad y Justicia (FINJUS). They carried placards, waved copies of the Constitution and sang.

The "slogan law" has become a hot topic in political circles, rivaling stories on USTR Robert Zoellick's visit and FTA negotiations. The full civil society "Elections Monitoring Commission" headed by Msgr Agripino Nunez met January 14 and endorsed their board's unanimous rejection of the draft law. A full-page ad in "Hoy" on January 15 signed by 60 retired police and military officers -- half of them formerly of flag rank -- fiercely rejected the proposal as unconstitutional. The omnibus NGO "Coalition for Transparency" petitioned House of Representatives President Pacheco to stop action on the proposal because of its unconstitutionality.

Proponents of the law had already agreed to submit it to the Supreme Court for an advisory opinion after passage but before the signature into law. Our own reading of the revised version of the "slogan law" -- now labeled the "preferential vote law" -- as circulated earlier this week is that it conflicts directly with Article 90 of the Constitution ("When no candidate obtains an absolute majority of the valid votes, a second election will be carried out 45 days later. Participants are limited to the two candidates who obtained the greatest number of votes in the first election.") The PRD-sponsored draft provides in contrast that "participants in a second round are limited to the leading candidates of the two parties having received the most valid votes in the first round."

President Mejia's three in-house PRD rivals have been scrambling. Early in the week they declared that they would join forces and back one of their number under the proposed new arrangements. On Wednesday they jointly filed a petition to the Supreme Court to declare unconstitutional certain articles of the current Electoral Law which requires candidates for the presidency to be sponsored by a political party.

President Mejia is in a "win-win" situation on this issue. The PRD convention is scheduled to go ahead on Sunday, January 18, with Mejia running against two relative unknowns and certain to take the nomination. He will be on the ballot, no matter what the outcome of the "slogan law" debate.

[1](#)2. Drafted by Angela Kerwin.  
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